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SUBJECT: COM CONVERSATION WITH FRENCH AMBASSADOR

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) On December 27, COM lunched with Frederic Dore, the new French Ambassador to Havana, as part of our regular contact with the French embassy, but also in anticipation of France taking the EU lead in Cuba for the next year. Slovenia, the next leader of the EU Troika has no representation in Cuba.

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France to take of EU Leadership in Cuba in January  
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¶2. (C) Dore urged that if we sent anyone to Ljubljana to discuss Cuba, it would be important for the person to stop in Paris as well, given France's role as de facto EU coordinator on the island for the next six months. Dore said he had spoken with the Slovenian Ambassador to Madrid, who is co-designated for Cuba, but doubted the Slovenian would get to Cuba very often from Spain, making him (Dore) the EU point person on the ground for the months to come.

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Current State of Affairs in Cuba  
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¶3. (C) Dore agreed with our analysis on the degree to which immense expectations have built up in the Cuban population, partly as a result of Raul's own speech-ifying, partly the product of the acceleration in the deterioration on the island, partly just the natural evolution of average Cubans and their thinking. Dore said he was struck by the worn-down nature of almost everything he had seen in his first three months here. The system cannot go on as it is.

¶4. (C) Dore asked what we thought of the Cuban announcement they would sign the two HR covenants. COM replied that it was not what the regime said as much as what it does that matters. He pointed out the contradiction between FM Felipe Perez Roque announcing Cuba's intention to sign at the same time, literally, as Cuban police were going after human rights marchers. He also noted that the blow to the head of Laura Pollan around that same time was the first time in memory that the authorities had gotten physical with one of the Damas de Blanco. Dore agreed that the regime is trying to put out a different image of itself, but that their intention "to retain total control of Cuban society" remains unchanged. He said the EU position on Perez Roque's announcement was similar--that saying you intend to sign is one thing but seeing what you do is what really matters.

¶5. (C) On the issue of political prisoners, Dore said the EU had made repeated demarches, but always discreetly. He felt

it important they keep up that pressure, and he expected the pattern to continue over the next six months. He had little expectation that the regime would do more than release those whose sentences had been completed, but felt it was important, nonetheless, for the regime to know what the international community expected of it. For that reason the EU would keep talking about lists of prisoners. COM cautioned about getting too hung up on specific lists, reciting the famous Supreme Court justice's adage about pornography.

16. (C) Looking down the road, Dore thought the speeches this week at the fall session of the Asamblea Nacional would be an important indicator of the thinking of those at the top, but agreed that equally critical would be whatever popular reaction there might be to what comes out. In the Spring, and before the French Presidency takes over in July, he said the EU would have to review its common position on Cuba, but he thought that so much was likely to happen between now and then that it was a pure exercise in speculation to try to predict what the EU is likely to do. Internal divisions aside, Dore mused, the EU has to react to what actually happens. Since he has been here, Dore noted, there have been repeated promises and predictions of impending change in Cuba. To date, there has been none. He repeatedly emphasized his amazement at the hullabaloo over what to date has been "exactly zero" in terms of actual change.  
PARMLY